

Battle of Stones River, TN

An account of the Battle of Stones River from the diary of Pvt. Jacob Adams, Co. F, 21st O.V.I.

Wednesday, December 31st. The battle opened at daybreak on the right of the line, with little change in our position from the day before. Our brigade consisted of the 21st Ohio, commanded by Colonel James Neibling; the 74th Ohio, commanded by Colonel Moody, and two or three other regiments; the brigade was commanded by Colonel Miller. We found ourselves engaged behind a rail fence in a strip of cedar timber some distance to the right of the Murfreesboro Pike.

This being the first heavy fire the regiment was ever under, the boys stood up under it in fine shape, and were greatly encouraged and enthused when Colonel "Jim," as we called Colonel Neibling, went up and down the line repeating, "Give 'em Hell by the acre, boys!"

We were elated in our success in holding our line intact against assault after assault by enmassed columns, when after some time we knew by the firing that the right wing of our army was giving way, but we held our ground until all of our support on the right was withdrawn and the enemy were pouring in shot and shell from our right and rear, and we got orders to retire. The most of the way for about one-third of a mile was through a cedar thicket. My course took me through a small open space where the enemy could rake it with a battery they had posted at short range, as well as a strong force of infantry, and it was some hot place, and our speed if possible was increased. A charge of grape and canister, fired from the battery struck the ground near enough me that I could feel the shot move in the ground under my feet. We reformed a short distance to the right of the Murfreesboro and Nashville turnpike, near where the "Chicago Board of Trade" Battery was posted to cover our retreat. This they did nobly and bravely, as their appearance indicated when we first saw them, still bravely manning their remaining undisable pieces, stripped to the hide, with sweat and blood running down their bodies. Their horses were all killed and perhaps half of their pieces disabled.

This engagement was a costly one to our company. The three Stoker boys, of whom we were proud, on account of their fine appearance and good qualities, were either killed or wounded, with John Wilkison and others.

January, 1863

Thursday, January 1st, found our regiment guarding the supply train, on the Nashville Pike about four miles from the battle line, where we remained until Friday, January 2nd.

The "boys" recieved the news of the Emancipation Proclamation philosophically. They had the utmost faith in President Lincoln and felt that whatever he did was for the right. While we enlisted to preserve the Union we always felt that slavery was wrong and were glad to feel that now we were fighting against it and were sure we would do away with it.

On Friday, January 2nd, about 3 p.m. just after we had drawn part of a ration of flour and had mixed it into a dough preparatory to throwing it into the hot ashes to bake, we got orders to fall in and double quick to the front. Here we took position to the left of our battle line with our brigade and the rest of our division on the west bank of Stones River, north of the railroad and pike, on the bend of the river below the ford. We lay down and awaited the recrossing of the river by Van Cleve's Division, who had occupied the heights, an important position on the other side of the river, and who were heavily pressed by the enemy and were falling back. General Negley not being present, Colonel Miller ordered us to arise, give the enemy a volley and charge across the river through ice cold water. It took me up about the waist, so I had to hold up my cartridge box to keep my ammunition dry. Our charge took the enemy completely by surprise, and drove them back across the river and up the hill, wher we captured a battery.

Disobeying two different orders from a superior officer to retire his command back across the river, Colonel Miller pushed his followers forward, driving the enemy before him until dark, when relieved by other troops. This charge ended the battle for that night. At midnight Bragg planned a council of his generals, and they decided to withdraw. By 11 p.m.

of Jauary 3rd, Bragg's whole army, except his cavalry, were withdrawing to a position on



the Duck River, and our army was too badly crippled to follow up the retreat in force. By the end of the 4th, even the rebel cavalry was withdrawn from our immediate front.

When our division was relieved after dark, we retired across the river, and our regiment bivouacked for the night on the west side near a farm house. Believing we would not be called out that night, I went inside the house and in the darkness crawled in between some soldiers with my wet clothes on and they did not protest the least. I had a good night's sleep. When I woke in the morning I discovered my bed fellows were all dead soldiers. The building had been used as a field hospital and before our charge the living had all been removed and the dead left.

Saturday, 3rd. No great demonstration on part of either side. (I did not here attempt to give an account of the battle, but only what came under my own observation.)

Sunday, 4th. The day was occupied in burying the dead.

